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ALGERIA

Topography

Algeria is divided physically into two distinct complexes: the Atlas mountains and plateaus to the north, with average elevations of 3,000 to 5,000 feet, and the vast Sahara on the south. With few exceptions the approaches to the Algerian coasts are clear and deep and are backed by a coastal plain that varies from a few thousand feet to 25 miles in width. Oran, Algiers, and Philipville provide good berthing for a limited number of vessels. These ports are tied in with the coastal rail and highway systems.

The Tell Atlas (Atlas Tellien) mountains border the coast of northern Algeria in relatively regular parallel ranges and are interspersed with plains and cultivated river valleys. Lateral movement along the coast is good, but steep grades, numerous bridges, and restricting defiles make movement to the interior difficult. The Saharan Atlas (Atlas Saharien) which drop off sharply to the Sahara desert, are a discontinuous chain of relatively short and narrow ranges marking the southern limit of the Atlas complex. Here broad, level plains are the predominant features of the landscape rather than the sharp profile of the 6,500 foot mountain summits.

The high Plateaus of the Atlas, forming a wedge shaped upland area, lie between the Tell Atlas and the Saharan Atlas. The area is marked by an almost complete absence of relief, and slopes eastward from elevations over

3,000 feet to approximately 1,400 feet in the Hodna Basin. In eastern Algeria the Tell Atlas and Saharan Atlas are not clearly distinguishable. They form a compact block in contrast to the parallel relief features of western Algeria. In the east, mountain heights exceed 6,000 feet.

The Sahara makes up 90 percent of the total area of Algeria. Most of the surface is broken rock and gravel, although large quantities of wind-blown sand have collected in interior basins in the east. Only the Ahaggar highlands of the southeast Sahara exceed 3,000 feet in elevation.

In the northern mountains, numerous flood swollen gorges and steep grades create hazards to movement during the rains and snows of winter. Lack of water and ill defined routes hinder Saharan travel, and heavy traffic on secondary roads north of the Saharan Atlas is not practical during winter months.

Climate

The climate of Algeria is marked by sharp contrasts. Northern Algeria has the cool, wet winters of southern Europe but in summer may experience the typically hot, dry weather of the Sahara. On the coast, frost is rare but is common inland. In the Atlas mountains, winter temperatures near 0°F are encountered. Although no real winter comes to the Sahara, a cool season of several weeks duration in January or February brings frequent minimums below 32°F.

Along the coast, average maximum temperatures are near 85°F during summer months. Temperatures of 100°F with uncomfortably high humidity are common. Temperatures in the Sahara, among the hottest in the world, are highest in July, but daily temperatures well over 100°F are not restricted

to summer months. Strong, dry, dust-laden wind of varying extent and duration originate in the Sahara and blow over northern Algeria. Although a distinct discomfort in summer, this warm sirocco is welcomed during the cold, damp winter. In the Sahara the summer diurnal temperature range averages 36 Fahrenheit degrees but may be well over 50 degrees in July and August. The contrast between maximum temperature and minimum ground temperature may be over 80 degrees.

Precipitation decreases inland from Mediterranean slopes, which receives over 40 inches, to the parched Sahara. Summers, except for higher elevations, are almost invariably rainless. The Saharan Atlas average only 14 inches despite their elevation. A maximum of 4 inches falls in the desert, and sometimes an area may receive no rainfall for several years in a row. Visibility, except for some summer fog and dust, is good. The degree of cloud cover is small in all seasons. Gales and rough water may be encountered on the coast in winter, but are uncommon in summer.

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